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Navy spy confesses selling secrets to Israel

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WASHINGTON — The saga of how Israel spied on its best friend in the world emerged with all the twists of a John Le Carre novel yesterday as Jonathan Jay Pollard pleaded guilty to espionage.

Shadowy spymasters, Parisian vacations, a rendezvous on the Potomac, and a diamond-and-sapphire ring figured in the cloak-and-dagger tale that surfaced in a federal district courthouse.

Pollard, 31, a former U.S. Navy intelligence analyst, confessed he passed super-secret military documents to Jerusalem.

Using safe houses, a code system based on the Hebrew alphabet, and a makeshift copy center in a Washington apartment, Pollard fed his "handlers" the classified documents they requested.

Using foreign bank accounts and an Israeli passport in the name of "Danny Cohen," Pollard pocketed \$45,000 and accepted the grand tour of Europe for handing over the sensitive information.

Pollard, a counter-terrorism expert, cut a deal with prosecutors that assured him something less than a life sentence.

His wife, Anne Henderson-Pollard, 26, also pleaded guilty as an accomplice to receiving embezzled government property and national defense documents. She could get 10 years.

The deal spares Israel a long and troublesome trial rife with embarrassing disclosures.

But the Justice Dept. tract based on Pollard's tell-all confession is damning enough as it is.

The document suggests Pollard's "handlers" were not part of a rogue faction within Israeli intelligence — rather, they were part of a larger mainstream operation.

It spells out the roles of four key Israeli operatives:

● Rafael Eitan, the legendary masterspy and counter-terrorism expert who was the ringleader of the Pollard affair.

● Col. Aviem Sella, an officer in the Israeli Air Force who was first approached by Pollard when he was a graduate student at New York University.

● Yosef Yagur, a former science consul at the Israeli consulate in Washington who stroked Pollard by telling him how his information was being used on a day-to-day basis in the Mideast.

● Irat Erb, a secretary in the Israeli embassy in Washington whose apartment was Pollard's drop-off point for suitcases full of documents.

The Justice Dept. papers contain cryptic hints of "others" involved in the conspiracy — including an unnamed American.

Pollard was a Watch Officer for the Anti-Terrorist Alert Center of the Threat Analysis Division of the Naval Investigative Service in 1984.

He met Col. Sella, somewhere in New York, told him he wanted to work for Israel, and produced a sample of the intelligence he could supply.

The two agreed on a code system based on the Hebrew alphabet and arranged to set up future contacts

through pay phone booths in Washington.

Later they arranged to swap documents for cash — and hatched a cover story to explain how the spy could possess large sums of money beyond his means.

Subsequent meetings took place in Potomac, Md., with an Israeli known only as "Uzi," in which more documents were exchanged and photographed.

Sella returned to Israel and Pollard was assigned a new "handler" and ordered to go to Paris to discuss arrangements for drop sites.

Pollard took his wife on the week-long trip in November, 1984 where he met with Sella, Eitan, and Yagur. The Israeli government footed the bill — \$10,000 in cash.

Sella had another surprise for Pollard at one of their strategy sessions in France — he gave him a diamond-and-sapphire ring for his wife.

Eitan told Pollard in Paris that Jerusalem was seeking top-secret American intelligence "in order to identify and assess threats to Israeli security."

Three times a week, Pollard, who had the highest security clearance, used a "courier card" to leave his Maryland office without being searched.

He'd drive to a car wash where he'd transfer documents he'd removed into a special briefcase.

The next stop was the Washington apartment of Irat Erb, where twice a week, usually on a Friday evening, he'd drop off the documents.

They would be copied over the week-

end, he'd pick them up on a Sunday, and Pollard would get them back to his office on Monday before they were missed.

Once a month Pollard met Yagur in a second apartment the Israelis rented in Erb's building and transformed into a sophisticated copying center.

"The U.S. classified documents which Mr. Pollard delivered to his handlers revealed scientific, technical, and military intelligence," the Justice Dept. said.

In the summer of 1985, Pollard took the Grand Tour of Europe, again at Israel's expense, and when he arrived in the land of his spymasters they had another surprise in store for him.

It was an Israeli passport bearing the monicker "Danny Cohen," which was to be his new name.

"The passport was a demonstration of gratitude for services rendered in that it identified Mr. Pollard as a citizen of Israel," the court papers say.

Pollard was also presented with a \$30,000 foreign bank account in the name of Danny Cohen — and told another \$30,000 would be deposited for each of the remaining nine years in what was then projected to be a ten-year spy project.

But in November of 1985, after just 18 months of espionage, the FBI closed in.

"The Israeli Embassy will have no comment," said spokesman Yosi Gal. "We have pledged to fully cooperate with the United States and we are continuing to do so."